

BOOK REVIEWS

International Perspectives on Home Education: Do We Still Need Schools?

Paula Rothermel (Ed.)

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This book is a welcome addition to the growing number of works on the subject of home education which is an increasingly popular worldwide movement. It stands out from the usual fare of books on the subject to provide readers with information and perspectives, drawn from research on the home school experience derived from a number of diverse global and cultural settings. The anthology's contributors come from various academic communities "including the UK, USA, Australia, Israel, Afghanistan, Norway, Germany, Belgium, Columbia, Spain, India and Canada" (p. 1). The book is especially useful to parents who intend to homeschool their children, already do so, are struggling with making the decision to home educate or not, or anyone curious about the nature of homeschooling and what it entails. Those looking for conceptual stimulation in the area of education in general will also find this work useful.

Paula Rothermel, the editor, has excellent credentials for undertaking this project. She completed her PhD in 2002 on the subject of homeschooling, has published extensively on the topic and serves as an expert witness dealing with homeschooling legal issues.

This anthology contains twenty-one chapters placed under six headings: *The Learning Process*, *Tensions and Criticisms*, *Political Conflict*, *Lifestyle and Choice*, *Models: War, Poverty, Cultural*, and *Intercultural Relations*. Although most of the book's chapters consist of stimulating pieces, the book gets off to a rather flat start with "Home Educating Parents: Martyrs or Pathmakers?" by Leslie Safron Barson. The chapter presents results of interviews "with 34 parents who had homeschooled their children for over three years" (p. 22). The issues dealt with are financial circumstances, career and work, parents' time for themselves, and their personal interests. Unfortunately, this chapter is rather banal, containing information anyone with a slight familiarity with homeschooling could easily surmise for her/himself. What is especially puzzling about this piece is the editor's placement of it under the heading, *The Learning Process* (p. 19) as this chapter has more to do with the conditions affecting those engaged in homeschooling. A better fit might have been in the section *Lifestyle and Choice*.

Despite its insipid beginning, the rest of the book contains a wealth of valuable information and some very cognitively appealing articles. For example, on the other end of the

qualitative spectrum, I found Sugata Mitra’s “Minimally Invasive Education: Pedagogy for Development in a Connected World” to be an exceptionally worthwhile contribution to this book. Based upon a number of experiments principally conducted in India, it was found that the goals of formal education can be met or at least supplemented by an alternative education system so long as two conditions are satisfied: “1. The existence of the Internet, 2. The existence of a technology for free and public access to the Internet” (p. 254). With very little direction, if any, from competent adults, children between the ages of 8 to 13 years were able to learn to use technology and the Internet to educate themselves. Among other things, these experiments provide support for the unschooling method of home schooling pioneered by John Holt that emphasizes self-directed, interest driven, child-focused learning.

Homeschooling parents looking for justification for their unwillingness to have their children subjected to standardized testing will find Nicky Hardenberg’s “Validity of High Stakes Standardized Test Requirements for Homeschoolers: A Psychometric Analysis” very helpful. Questions concerning the right of the state versus that of the parents to determine whether or not children are to be home educated are presented in several chapters set out in *Part III: Political Conflict*. In “Home Education: A Human Right?” Daniel Monk explores key court cases that have challenged the idea that homeschooling is a fundamental right that parents have. It is interesting to note the dogmatic and basically authoritarian manner in which this issue was handled in Germany as evidenced by among others, the Konrad Case. Those seeking a more detailed look at the 2006 judgment, *Konrad and Others v. Germany*, will appreciate Joke Sperling’s “Home Education and the European Convention on Human Rights” which provides an insightful analysis of this pivotal case.

For the most part, the chapters in this anthology are favourable to the home education movement. However, if one wants to look at arguments opposing home education, Christopher Lubienski and T. Jameson Brewer’s “Does Home Education ‘Work’? Challenging the Assumptions behind the Home Education Movement” sets out a valuable exposition of the usual reasons given in support of those opposing home education, such as the idea that homeschoolers are not properly socialized. Those who think that homeschooling is an activity largely engaged in by white middle class families are in for a surprise when reading Cheryl Fields-Smith’s “Black Homeschoolers: Nowhere Left to Go.” Indeed, the author claims that “Black families represent the largest growing homeschool population in the US” (p. 278).

Whether one is in favour of or against home education, as Paula Rothermel points out rather emphatically, research shows that “parental involvement is the single most influential factor in children’s success” (p.2). This piece of information alone, which for many is self-evident, might lead some to choose the way of homeschooling. Like most anthologies, the contents of this work are qualitatively uneven; nevertheless, it certainly contains a sufficient number of cognitive delights to recommend it.

Reviewer details

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